

# Grey seals

The grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) is found throughout the temperate and sub-arctic waters of the North Atlantic (Prime & Hammond, 1990). An estimated 92 000 animals in Great Britain are thought to be at least half of the world population (Prime & Hammond, 1990). According to Planque et al. (2021) and Pint et al.



(2023), seals are opportunistic feeders that eat more than just fish, which they forage for in different areas. Squid (*Loligo vulgaris*) and Crustaceans are examples of these species other than fish (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023).

## History/ Population trends

Humans have extensively hunted seals for centuries (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2018; Reijnders et al., 1995). This, combined with other reasons such as disease and pollution, caused the population of seals to decline (Brasseur et al., 2018). Increased human settlement in the area and intensified hunting reduced the Grey seal population, and the species became virtually extinct in the Wadden Sea at the end of the 16th century (Reijnders et al., 1995). Because of the growing grey seal population on the Farne Islands in the 20th century, more animals migrated to the Dutch Wadden Sea (Reijnders et al., 1995). In 1980, a small colony was found between the islands of Vlieland and Terschelling and since then the population of Grey seals has steadily increased throughout the entire Wadden Sea (Reijnders et al., 1995).

## Miscellaneous

- An adult grey seal needs about 400 sandeel per day to stay healthy (Thompson & Fedak, 2001).
- Grey seals have an average dive time of about 4 minutes, with a maximum recorded dive time of 18 minutes (Thompson & Fedak, 2001).
- Grey seals males have, on average, thicker blubber than female Grey seals do (Siebert et al., 2022). A suggested reason for this is because male fight during mating season, in which case it would be advantageous to have thicker blubber as a defensive mechanism (Siebert et al., 2022).
- Grey seals have their pups between September and December, and keep to the shore for up to three to four weeks, as it takes time before the white-coated pup learns to swim (University of St. Andrews, n.d.).

## Diet

- Sandeel (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Cod (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Whiting (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Flatfish (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Herring (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Sprat (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Small fish (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Cephalopods (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Crustaceans (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Other detritivores (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Small sharks (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)
- Small skates and rays (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023; Prime & Hammond, 1990)

## Sources

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